

‘What do they know of England who only England know’:

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‘What do they know of England who only England know’: a case for an alternative narrative of the ordinary in 21st century Britain.¹

Abstract

In 2017 it was 20 years since the publication of *Assimilating Identities. Racism and Education in Post 1945 Britain* (London: Lawrence and Wishart). In this study a narrative was constructed which documented the experiences of Afro-Caribbean and Asian children and families within the English education system. It was a narrative which drew largely on the education archives of the local state. Some use was made of documentary evidence generated within the black community, including oral testimony. In the intervening years there has been a shift in history practice, including history of education, towards a broadening of the source material used in the construction of narratives, most notably the use of visual sources. These years have also seen a growing interest amongst historians of education in looking beyond schooling and investigating the educational experiences associated with other sites of learning: congresses, museums, heritage sites, libraries, community centres etc. This paper aims to bring these two developments – research engagement with the visual and non school sites of learning – into dialogue by revisiting the research agenda which shaped *Assimilating Identities* and addressing the question twenty years on: ‘What do they know of England who only England know?’

Prologue: July 2016-February 2017

On the 1st July 2016 the Institute of Race Relations [IRR] posted the following comment on its website:

After years and years of struggle against racial hostility to new migrant communities, we are back there again – albeit post Brexit, which, seemingly, has taken the shame out of racism. And now, just like in the 1970s, communities up and down the country are experiencing an upsurge in racist and fascist violence.

It then reported that while Police data suggested that there was an immediate 57% increase in reported incidents of violence against migrants and Black and Asian Britons in the four days after the result of the referendum was announced their own first review of the national picture suggested this figure was a substantial under-estimate. Social media was full of descriptions of hostility and racist abuse across the country with perpetrators taunting ‘passers-by on buses, on the streets, in workplaces, or from the safety of their vehicles, with comments like “get packing”, “white power”, “time for you to leave” or “get out, we voted Leave.”’ The IRR also noted the number of incidents reported to have taken place in schools, where children had been taunted and ridiculed by classmates and of physical assaults and attacks on black and minority ethnic run businesses and cultural centres.² The IRR has since maintained its national monitoring of racist incidents and hate crimes and for first two weeks in February 2017 it reported the following incidents:

¹ The author would like to thank the History of Education Society UK and the Australian and New Zealand History of Education Society (AZHES) for the invitation to speak at their joint conference *Sight, Sound and Text in the History of Education* in 2016 and the anonymous reviewers who provided helpful critical comments on the original paper.

² [http://www.irr.org.uk/news/calendar-of-racism-and-resistance/Post by IRR 1/7/16](http://www.irr.org.uk/news/calendar-of-racism-and-resistance/Post%20by%20IRR%201/7/16) accessed September 2017 See, for example, ‘Mother tells of “racist” attack on 10-year-old boy,’ *The Guardian*, 8th September, 2016 and ‘MP: Brexit has unleashed 1930s-style racism in the UK,’ *Birmingham Post*, October 20, 2016.

9 February: Police seek information on a racist attack on a 16-year-old boy and girl by a woman who racially abused the pair before punching one of the teenagers 'a number of times' on Oxford High Street. (*Oxfordshire Guardian*, 9 February 2017)

10 February: Police release an appeal for information after a 35-year-old man has his jaw broken in an unprovoked racially aggravated attack by three men in Street, Somerset. (*Somerset Live*, 10 February 2017)

10 February: John Nimmo is jailed for 27 months at Newcastle crown court after pleading guilty to nine charges involving online racist and antisemitic abuse, to numerous people including Luciana Berger, MP. (*Guardian*, 10 February 2017)

11 February: Bristol UKIP councillor Philip Winter is condemned for tweeting about 'darkies'. (*The Canary*, 13 February 2017)

11 February: New research by HOPE not Hate finds that right-wing bloggers and social media activists in the UK have helped the alt-right movement spread fake news. Download a short version of the report by Joe Mulhall: *Going Mainstream: The mainstreaming of anti-Muslim prejudice in Europe and North America* [here](#) (pdf file, 760kb). (*Guardian*, 11 February 2017)

12 February: Ukip's immigration spokesperson, John Bickley, apologises for tweeting a cartoon which suggested that voting for Labour would lead to 'a jihadi for a neighbour,' echoing a racist slogan used in Smethwick in the 1964 general election. (*Huffington Post*, 13 February 2017)

15 February: New figures reveal that hate crimes recorded by regional police forces increased by up to 100 per cent in the months following Brexit. (*Independent*, 15 February 2017)

15 February: A Dunfermline sheriff's court orders a 44-year-old man to carry out 200 hours of unpaid work and imposes a six-month restriction of liberty order after he admits glassing a Portuguese tourist in a bar last February. (*Dunfermline Press*, 15 February 2017).³

These are just a handful of the incidents reported, but they give an indication of the continuing nature of the hostility towards migrants and black and Asian Britons. Some political commentators linked this hostility to the various ways that the UK has gone down the road of co-opting its citizens into immigration policing,⁴ others blamed it directly on the toxic nature of the referendum debate with its inflammatory rhetoric and the shameless xenophobia of the Leave campaign⁵, a conclusion supported by a United Nations committee.⁶ Given

³ <http://www.irr.org.uk/news/calendar-of-racism-and-resistance-10-23-february-2017/> accessed September 2017. The IRR regularly issue new updates

⁴ Frances Webber, 'Short Cuts,' *London Review of Books* 31 March 2016, 10. See also the *Schools Against Borders for Children Campaign*, <https://www.schoolsabc.net/> accessed March 2017.

⁵ See, David Olusoga, 'It was supposed to be a dialogue about free trade. It morphed into a national feud over immigration,' *The Observer*, 26th June, 2016; Gary Younge, 'How did we end up here,' *The Guardian*, 30th June, 2016; 'Brexit will increase intolerance outside our football grounds, says Kick it Out,' *The Guardian*, 9th August, 2016

⁶ The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, August 2016 see 'Politicians' anti-immigrant rhetoric fuelled post-Brexit hate crime spike, United Nations says', <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/brexit-hate-crime-nigel Farage-united-nations-un-body-committee-politicians-britain-a7211786.html>

politicians' rhetoric there is a new permission to hate immigrants⁷ accompanied by a resurgence of 'ignorant-and-proud-of-it nationalism',⁸ and a leaching from the public sphere of 'compassion.'⁹ There is, as another commentator concluded, 'a real darkness in this country, a xenophobic, racist sickness of heart that is closer to the surface today than it has been for decades.'¹⁰ There is anger and not argument.¹¹ Closed borders and closed minds as 'racists have been energised by the victory of racists.'¹²

The referendum undoubtedly spurred an upsurge in popular racism, but it should never be forgotten that racism and xenophobia in Britain have a long history and that racist abuse and discriminatory practices have been, and are, a structural feature of daily life. This is readily evidenced in the recent Department for Education (DfE) statistics showing the number of primary school pupils being suspended for racist abuse having increased by in a third in five years¹³, in the Bureau of Investigative Journalism report that nearly one in five people stopped by Immigration Enforcement in Britain's cities are UK nationals¹⁴, in proposed changes to include questions on school children's nationalities and countries of birth on the annual school census and the sharing of data between the Department for Education (DfE) and the Home Office which the Director of Liberty characterised as turning the DfE into 'a border control force'¹⁵ and in the Conservative government's recent *Race Disparity Audit* (2017).¹⁶

The rise of traditionalism, xenophobia and popular nationalism in the UK has also been paralleled by sustained assault on the concept of multiculturalism, to the extent that it led one commentator to conclude that it is now 'widely scorned and trivialized' and 'excluded from serious analysis and critical conversation' and that 'debate has been succeeded by a much more diffuse consideration of social and cultural diversity.'¹⁷ While in education, as the convenors of one recent conference argued, a 'colonizing' model is emerging which seeks 'to replace "incorrect" or "lesser" knowledge with "correct" or "better knowledge,"' where 'difference is seen as

⁷ Aditya Chakraborty, 'After a campaign scarred by bigotry it is now OK to be racist in Britain,' *The Guardian*, 28 June 2016; Owen Jones, 'Bigots feel they've a mandate to hate. We have to speak out,' *The Guardian*, 15 September, 2016

⁸ Nick Cohen, 'Theresa May lied and lied again to become PM,' *The Observer*, 30th October, 2016.

⁹ Chibundu Onuzo, 'When is a refugee too old for kindness?,' *The Guardian*, 22nd October, 2016

¹⁰ John Lanchester, 'Brexit Blues,' *London Review of Books* 38, 15 28th July, 2016, 6.

¹¹ See, Mark Thompson, *Enough Said: What's gone wrong with the language of politics?* (London: Bodley Head).

¹² Zoe Williams, 'Normalisation. Are we deluding ourselves about Donald Trump,' *The Guardian* G2, 16th November, 2016.

¹³ Frances Perraudin, 'Number of primary pupils suspended for racist abuse has risen by a third in five years,' *The Guardian*, 27th December 2016

¹⁴ Damien Gayle, Charles Boutaud and Adam Cantwell-Corn, 'Nearly 20% of immigration stops "involve British citizens,"' *The Guardian*, 9th October, 2017.

¹⁵ Damien Gayle, 'Pupil data given to Home Office to deter illegal migrants,' *The Guardian*, 16 December, 2016

¹⁶ Cabinet Office, *Race Disparity Audit* (London, HM Government, October 2017) https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/650723/RDAweb.pdf accessed October 2017.

¹⁷ Paul Gilroy, 'Conclusion' in *Parallel Perspectives. Transnational curation in London 2015-16* (London: King's College, London, 2017) 61.

something to be removed' and 'the subaltern (perceived incorrect/lesser) position is replaced with the dominant (perceived correct/better) position.'¹⁸

Revisiting the Past and Looking to the Present

It is not unusual for practitioners of disciplines to on occasion reflect on the state of their field, charting achievements and assessing prospects for the future, and history of education is no exception.¹⁹ For this author, 2017 marked 20 years since the publication of *Assimilating Identities. Racism and Educational Policy in Post 1945 Britain* and this anniversary offered a personal departure point for reflecting on the origins of the political and social turbulence associated with 'Brexit' Britain and the increased incidence of hostility towards migrants and black and Asian Britons as documented above. Drawing on arguments and analyses about popular and state racism and emergent multiculturalism developed by Sivanandan, Hiro, Hall, Miles, and Gilroy, and education focused work by Carby, Mullard, Dhondy, Troyna and Williams²⁰ *Assimilating Identities*, through its focus on national and local education policy making, attempted to offer a historical and political analysis of how racialised identities had been imagined, constructed, re-worked and developed in post war Britain to the extent that they became a constitutive part of an exclusionary ideology. This ideology, which underpinned the idea of a 'British way of life', distinguished between those who were 'of' the nation, and those who were, and always would be, 'outside' the nation. It embodied a definition of belonging which was articulated by Margaret Thatcher and other Conservatives during the Falklands war: 'The people of the Falkland Islands, like the people of the United Kingdom, are an island race. Their way of life is British; their allegiance is to the Crown' and 'the Falkland Islands are British, the Falkland Islanders are British. They are our own people. With the Falkland Islanders it is family.'²¹ It was a definition of belonging where to be non-white and to be British were mutually exclusive, 'the Falklanders were British ... by language, customs, race ... more British indeed than so-called "Black Englishmen" living on British soil.'²² It was a definition which also directly connected with earlier articulations of the essence of national identity associated with the Conservative MP

¹⁸ *Decolonizing Teacher Education*, University of Exeter, March 10-11, 2017

¹⁹ See, for example, Jeroen H. Dekker and Frank Simon (eds.) 'Shaping the History of Education? The First 50 Years,' *Paedagogica Historica*, 50, 6, (2014).

²⁰ A. Sivanandan, *A Different Hunger* (London: Pluto Press, 1982); Dilip Hiro, *Black British, White British* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1971); Stuart Hall, 'Racism and Reaction,' *Five Views of Multi-Racial Britain* (London: Commission for Racial Equality, 1978) 23-35, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora,' in J. Rutherford (ed.) *Identity. Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990) 222-37, 'New Ethnicities' in J. Donald and A. Rattansi (eds.) *'Race', Culture and Difference* (London: Sage, 1992, 252-59); Robert Miles and Anna Phizacklea, *White Man's Country* (London: Pluto Press, 1984); Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (London: Hutchinson, 1987); Hazel Carby, 'Schooling in Babylon' in Centre for Cultural Studies, *The Empire Strikes Back*, (London: Hutchinson, 1982); Chris Mullard, 'Multiracial Education in Britain: From Assimilation to Cultural Pluralism' in J. Tierney (ed.) *Race, Migration and Schooling* (Eastbourne: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982); F. Dhondy, B. Beese and L. Hassan, *The Black Explosion in British Schools* (Race Today Publication, 1982); Barry Troyna and Jenny Williams, *Racism, Education and the State* (London: Routledge Kegan & Paul, 1986).

²¹ Margaret Thatcher, April 3, 1982, quoted in A. Barnett, 'Iron Britannica,' *New Left Review*, 134, (1982), 18; Margaret Thatcher, May 26, 1982, quoted in J. Taylor, 'The Falklands Factor,' *Ten* 8, 18 (1985) 17.

²² J. Casey, 'One nation: the politics of race,' *The Salisbury Review*, 1, Autumn (1982) 25.

Enoch Powell in the 1960s. *Assimilating Identities* concluded with a reflection on the possibilities of producing a transformative historical narrative of the nation, which would recognise the historical experiences of Britain's black population²³, and thus help to bring to an end the enduring post war practices of exclusion and subordination. *Assimilating Identities* drew heavily on parliamentary and local government debates, education reports and files.

In the last twenty years research into the educational histories of immigrant and minority communities has generally remained a minority interest in history of education, a situation which a recent review of the literature described as both 'peculiar' and 'negligent.'²⁴ These same years have also seen a disciplinary shift towards greater use of visual source material in history of education, a growing interest in the sensory, the material and spatial dimensions of education, and broadening of the focus beyond schooling to include other informal sites of learning. A shift that is captured in both the historiography of history of education in general and in the title of the 2016 History of Education conference: *Sight, Sound and Text in the History of Education*.²⁵

In a society where the residues of empire, the experience of decolonisation, immigration, and post-colonial settlement continue to exert an influence and issues around nationality, identity, belonging, plurality, heritage, memory and what it is to be English are vexed questions the present essay aims to address the question posed in its title *What do they know of England who only England know?* The phrase is taken from the first verse of Rudyard Kipling's 1891 patriotic poem 'The English Flag.' It is a phrase whose meaning was explored by Powell in the 1960s and was again in use in the immediate aftermath of the vote for Brexit.²⁶ Here, it will be explored not by interrogating the archives of the national and local state, but instead by focusing on three visual representations of the black experience in late 20th and early 21st century Britain: the television series *Empire Road* (1978-79) and two exhibitions – the *West Indian Front Room* (2005-06) and *By the Rivers of Birminam* (2012). The focus will be on the evidential content and value of these representations and not the aesthetics of dramatisation, museum display or photographic practice and how they relate to a society. The choice of these cultural interventions not only reflect a shift in disciplinary focus, but each in their own way also present

²³ The term 'black' is used inclusively to refer to people of South Asian, African and Caribbean origin. This usage in no way assumes that there is any uniformity between any people so described, except in the sense of reflecting a common experience of racism and discrimination on the basis of their 'non-white' colour.

²⁴ Marta Padovan-Özdemir and Christian Ydesen, 'Professional encounters with the post-WW11 immigrant: a privileged prism for studying the shaping of European welfare nation-states,' *Paedagogica Historica*, 52, 5, (2016): 428. See also, Kevin Myers, 'Immigrants and Ethnic Minorities in the History of Education,' *Paedagogica Historica*, 45, 6 (2009) 801-16

²⁵ See, for example, the activities of Network 17 Histories of Education of the European Educational Research Association. See also, Ian Grosvenor, Martin Lawn, and Kate Rousmaniere (eds.) *Silences and Images. The Social History of the Classroom* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999); Martin Lawn and Ian Grosvenor (eds.) *Materialities of Schooling* (Oxford: Symposium Books, 2005); Susan J. Matt and Peter N. Stearns (eds.) *Doing Emotions History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013); Thomas S. Popkewitz, *Rethinking the History of Education* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); J. Damousi & P. Hamilton (eds.) *A Cultural History of Sound, Memory and the Senses*. (London: Routledge); Inés Dussel and Karin Priem, 'The visual in histories of education: a reappraisal,' *Paedagogica Historica*, 53, 6 (2017).

²⁶ See below.

the unmediated 'voice' of black and Asian Britons, are indicative of the importance of agency in cultural production, and evidence and project the natural evolving possibilities associated with Britain being 'a truly multicultural society, the foremost in Europe, and its exemplar 'in the face of the continued 'logics of racial thought.' ²⁷

Empire Road, BBC Television 1978-79

The representation of Britain's black and Asian communities on popular television in the 1960s and 1970s was determined by white programme-makers. Popular sitcoms featuring black and Asian characters such as *Love Thy Neighbour* (ITV 1972-76), *Mind Your Language* (ITV 1977-79) and *Mixed Blessings* (LWT 1978-80) were generally played for laughs. The first serious attempt on television to go beyond the 'humour' inherent in prejudice was *The Fosters* (ITV, 1976-77)²⁸. It focused on a black British family in South London and the storylines featured everyday family issues such as inter-generational conflict, health and employment. The scripts were based on the popular US series *Good Times*, but the series achieved limited success and 'was criticised for failing to capture authentically black British lives.'²⁹ It was followed in 1978 by *Empire Road* which was written by the British Guyanese Michael Abbensetts and drew on his knowledge of Birmingham for both dramatic situations and characters. Set in the fictional inner city area of Thornley, but visually recognisable as part of Birmingham, the drama was structured around the Bennett family, who lived in the symbolically named 'Empire Road', and the activities of Everton Bennett, a successful shopkeeper, landlord, and local 'Godfather' to his neighbourhood community³⁰. The characters in *Empire Road* were, as Paul Long writes,

... variously 'villainous, virtuous, likeable, clever, witty, stupid, exploited, vain, strong, weak and sinful. They were individuals who struggled with work, with school and with life in general as well as enjoying its rewards, expressing their hopes and desires.' ³¹

Norman Beaton, who played Everton Bennett, reflecting back on the programme nearly a decade later commented:

It would be dangerous to espouse the view that the only interesting black people inhabit the ghetto ... black people come from every stratum of society ... In an article by Rosalind Carne in the *Guardian* in 1982, Michael Abbensetts admitted that his 'life does not revolve around white hostility and confrontations with the police.' When Abbensetts ... creates a character like Everton Bennett in *Empire Road* ... he is saying that the middle- class, well heeled people in my play are people I know

²⁷ Sivandanan A. Sivanandan in Burnett racial Violence ... ; Bill Schwarz, 'Afterword: The Predicament of History,' in Bill Schwarz (ED.) *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain* (Manchester: MUP, 2003) 251.

²⁸ Paul Long, 'Representing Race and Place: Black Midlanders on Television in the 1960s and 1970s,' *Midland History*, 36, 2 (2011), 271.

²⁹ Gavin Schaffer, *The Vision of a Nation. Making Multiculturalism on British Television, 1960-80*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014: 217. See, also Gavin Schaffer 'Framing The Fosters: jokes, racism and Black and Asian voices in British comedy television' in Sarita Malik and Darrell M. Newton (eds.) *Adjusting the contrast British television and constructs of race* (Manchester: Manchester university Press, 2017)

³⁰ Some of the episodes can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9QZUVVOyPgU> as can *The Fosters* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mhhy_Htg4s0 and *Love Thy Neighbour* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B1dakp4FT0w>

³¹ Interview with Norman Beaton in Jim Pines, *Black and White and Colour: black People in British Television since 1936* (London: BFI, 1992): 117.

about. Their lives are full of conflict. It is not however the ghetto of bricks and stones and petrol bombs. It is an essentially middle-class conflict of thwarted ambition, or the search for truth, identity or reality. This is no less valid an area of conflict than the young West Indian or British black trying to deal with his own crisis in the battle-scarred ghetto. It is ... the other side of the coin.³²

Empire Road was variously described in the press at the time as 'the Black *Coronation Street*' (*Daily Mail*), as 'the first drama series that black people can watch on television without feeling embarrassed or angry' (*Time Out*) and involving 'a whole range of material nothing to do with blacks or whites, just about people' (*The Guardian*).³³ Despite these positive comments *Empire Road* ran for just two seasons, a victim of internal BBC politics, lack of promotion, and poor viewing figures.³⁴ Beaton, described the second series, which included episodes directed by the Trinidadian Horace Ové, as a 'black soap written by a black man, directed by a black man, with a black cast. It was wonderful,' and was devastated when it was cancelled. Schaffer, rightly concludes, that in *Empire Road* black Britons 'were no longer extraordinary strangers but core parts of British communities.'³⁵ The combination of drama, comedy and tragedy and its urban location gave *Empire Road* both an air of realism and contemporary resonance in its representation of black urban lives. That said, for the black actors in *Empire Road* involvement was both a challenge and a burden, a challenge in terms of responsibility to accurately represent black Britain to the majority white audience, and the burden of always being seen as 'black' before they were seen as actors, a situation which in the decade that followed also increasingly affected black visual artists working in the fields of painting, photography and film.³⁶

'The West Indian Front Room. Memories and Impressions of Black British Homes', Geffrye Museum of the Home, 2005-06

Insert Fig 1 Installation, 'The West Indian Front Room, Geffrye Museum, London 2005-2006', Geffrye Museum, copyright John Neligan.

Insert Fig 2 Installation, 'Glass Cabinet, Geffrye Museum, London 2005-2006', Geffrye Museum, copyright John Neligan.

The exhibition *The West Indian Front Room* explored the 'essence of homes' created by post war immigrants from the Caribbean and at the centre was an installation by the writer and curator Michael McMillan which presented his vision of a typical West Indian front room drawn from memories of his parents' home in East London and those of his relatives in the 1960s and 1970s.³⁷ The front room was a place in which the family's

³² Norman Beaton, 'Beaton But Unbowed: And then the West End. Black Theatre in the 70s,' *The Race Today Review* February 1987, 19.

³³ Quoted in Long, 'Representing Race and Place,' 276; Schaffer, *The Vision of a Nation*, 256-257

³⁴ Long, 'Representing Race and Place,' 276

³⁵ Schaffer, *The Vision of a Nation*, 261

³⁶ Ian Grosvenor and Kevin Myers, 'Questioning difference: bodies, (re-)presentation and the development of 'multicultural Britain,' *Paedagogica Historica* 53, 6 (2017)

³⁷ See Michael McMillan, *The Front Room. Migrant Aesthetics* (Black Dog Publishing, 2009) which includes images, interviews and essays relating to the exhibition. McMillan's previous projects included *The Black Chair: an installation and exhibition rediscovering the West Indian Front Room*, shown at High Wycombe Museum

most treasured possessions were kept and the exhibition explored the symbolism of particular objects and the relationship between objects and identity. As McMillan remembered:

You weren't allowed in this room unless there were guests, but its Sunday, Jim Reeves's 'The Distant Drums' is blaring out of the 'Bluespot' radiogram and big people are chatting news from back home. Mum is drinking Babycham. I pass her the plastic pineapple ice bucket and listen quiet as a lamb, my skin sticking to the plastic covering on the PVC imitation leather settee. I smell of rice and peas and the paraffin heater competing with the air freshener and polish from the drinks cabinet filled with glasses that are never used. I touch the painted glass fish and plastic flowers on fanciful sugar-starched crochet on a gold-rimmed fake marble coffee table. A blue-eyed Jesus looks down at me from The Last Supper on floral wallpaper saying 'cleanliness is next to godliness'. Sunshine beams through pressed lace curtains onto the colourful patterned carpet. The front room looked so good, that it didn't matter how poor we were, we were decent people ... I know now that it is part of who I am and unconsciously I recreate a similar shrine in my own home today.

Visitors were encouraged to linger 'in the room', listen to interviews with first and second generation black Britons of Afro-Caribbean descent and look at displays of photographs from different domestic interiors (SEE Figs 1-2). The exhibition encouraged audiences to engage with the layers of meanings to be found in these domestic interiors and the ways in which they reflected 'personal, social, cultural and historical dynamics in everyday practices'³⁸ Although the front rooms generally displayed the same materiality being furnished with the same pieces of furniture - the paraffin heater, the radiogram, glass cabinet, drinks trolley, artificial flowers, floral wallpaper and carpets, crocheted doilies and elaborate lace net curtains³⁹ - it was also a private space of cultural creativity. Individual families expressed their aesthetic sensibility in their arrangement of their personal possessions, which signified as Stuart Hall writes, 'something special and different because they are individual to this family and grounded in history and memory which the objects somehow preserve and translate to another life.'⁴⁰ It was also a room, as McMillan remembered, into which you were invited, a room where there was a code of behaviour. This code had to be respected and respectability came from 'being validated by the outside world.'⁴¹ In just over three months the exhibition attracted 35,000 visitors.

'By the Rivers of Birminam', 2012

Insert Fig 3 'Children in Charleville Road, Handsworth, 1991,' Birmingham City Archives, copyright Vanley Burke

In 2012 the Midland Arts Centre in Birmingham brought together 100 photographs taken by Vanley Burke between 1968 and 2011 to present a visual history of five decades of black people's lives as they struggled to

(1998-9) and Slough Museum (2000), and *The West Indian Front Room* shown at Zion Arts, Manchester (2003) commissioned by Black Arts Alliance and *The West Indian Front Room: a performance installation* at The Albany, Deptford (2004).

See also several related videos on you tube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0SscGgN5EeQ>

³⁸ McMillan, *The Front Room*, 13.

³⁹ Ibid., 30-72.

⁴⁰ Stuart Hall, 'The West Indian Front Room' in McMillan, *The Front Room*, 20.

⁴¹ Ibid, 21

establish themselves in the local inner city area of Handsworth and other area nearby. As with all photographs his work freezes individual moments, but they remain accessible to memory. There are moments that are personal, familial, domestic and public. Images in the exhibition portrayed black subjects at work, in church, on the street and at home, there were images of smiling faces and others showing the grief of loss. There were photographs of young and old, elderly black men playing dominoes in a pub and young men setting up sound systems outdoors and in clubs. Individual portraits were displayed next to crowded Carnival scenes, all black religious congregations next to black youth in a playground (see Fig3). If a viewer looked closely they could visually piece together a history of black fashion, from the trilby hats of the Windrush generation to the woollen tams of Rastafarians, and from the adoption of 'Afro-styles' to 'rude boy' styling. Photograph after photograph in the exhibition challenged the negative images of black Britons found in the mainstream media. Commenting on his practice Burke said, 'I didn't want to express positivity, just what I saw. I didn't think in positive-negative when I photographed, I still don't ... I wanted to document life as it is lived. Document it as I've seen.'⁴² For Burke taking photographs was, and remains, about his community and about the ability to:

see something others may be unable to see, in terms of the value. Then show people. They need to see their contribution to this community. I mean, they have been contributing to this thing from the 50s and it's gone beyond, but there is no reference anywhere. It's about having themselves reflected, they are so desperate to see themselves. But this will be there, it isn't going anywhere.⁴³

Burke's photographs bring visibility to the everyday. They locate time and secure 'dimensions of the black experience that had been previously neglected or sidelined', ⁴⁴ dimensions that were in danger of being lost without his lens. They are generous, imbued with compassion and full of respect for his subjects. Each of his photographs invites the viewer to engage in an act of renewal, of 'seeing' and connecting with everyday reality. Over the last forty years, since his first exhibition in 1975, his photographs of *his* community have been displayed in schools, community centres, churches, barber shops and public houses as well as galleries.⁴⁵ In 2017, Birmingham Museums Trust purchased 100 hundred photographs by Burke as part of their 'Collecting Birmingham' project.

'What do they know of England who only England know?'

On 23 April 1961 Enoch Powell, MP and Minister of Health, gave a speech on the subject of England to The Royal Society of St George, and began:

There was a saying, not heard today so often as formerly "What do they know of England who only England know?"
It is a saying which dates. It has a period aroma, like Kipling's "Recessional" or the state rooms at Osborne. That phase is ended, so plainly ended, that even the generation born at its zenith, for whom

⁴² Quoted in Elliot Watson, 'Vanley Burke: Out of the Shadow,' <http://www.port-magazine.com/feature/vanley-burke-out-of-the-shadows/> accessed March 2017.

⁴³ Pete James, 'Home from Home: The Vanley Burke Archive' in *At Home with Vanley Burke* (Birmingham: Ikon, 2015): 32.

⁴⁴ Stuart Hall, 'Vanley Burke and the "Desire for Blackness."' in M. Sealy (ed). *Vanley Burke: A Retrospective*. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1993): 15

⁴⁵ See Grosvenor and Kevin Myers, 'Questioning difference'

the realisation is the hardest, no longer deceive themselves as to the fact. That power and that glory have vanished, as surely, if not as tracelessly, as the imperial fleet from the waters of Spithead.

... So we today, at the heart of a vanished empire, amid the fragments of demolished glory, seem to find, like one of her own oak trees, standing and growing, the sap still rising from her ancient roots to meet the spring, England herself.

Perhaps, after all, we know most of England "who only England know."

It was the task of his generation to return to the past, the past before Empire and identify 'what it is that binds us together ... the clue that leads through a thousand years ... the secret of this charmed life of England' and 'know how to hold it fast.' Powell continued,

So the continuity of her existence was unbroken when the looser connections which had linked her with distant continents and strange races fell away. Thus our generation is one which comes home again from years of distant wandering. We discover affinities with earlier generations of English who felt no country but this to be their own. We discover affinities with earlier generations of English who felt there was this deep, this providential difference between our empire and those others, that the nationhood of the mother country remained unaltered through it all.

For Powell 'the deepest instinct of the Englishman ... is for continuity' and from 'this continuous life of a united people ... spring, as from the soil of England, all that is peculiar in the gifts and the achievements of the English nation.'⁴⁶

Powell's speech with its references to an 'unaltered' English identity and nation, to landscape and history, and to 'strange races' and 'providential difference', was given at a time when the Conservative Government was moving to a position 'that something should be done'⁴⁷ to restrict the entry of Asian and black British subjects and a commitment to introduce statutory controls on Commonwealth immigration was announced the following October.⁴⁸ Throughout the remainder of the 1960s Powell continued to address the Island story, but increasingly connected this story with the threat to the English identity and nation posed by Commonwealth immigration and his rhetoric changed as he claimed to be speaking for 'ordinary, decent, sensible people.' In a now infamous passage from a speech in 1968, he reported:

A week or two ago I fell into conversation with a constituent, a middle aged, quite ordinary working man employed in one of our nationalised industries. After a sentence or two about the weather, he suddenly said "If I had the money to go, I wouldn't stay in this country ... in fifteen or twenty years time the black man will have the whip-hand over the white man."

Powell continued 'I simply do not have the right to shrug my shoulders ... What he is saying, thousands and hundreds of thousands are saying and thinking' who 'for reasons they could not comprehend ... they found themselves made strangers in their own country,' a 'transformation to which there is no parallel in a thousand years of English history.' In a rhetorical flourish he concluded, 'We must be mad, literally made, as a nation to

⁴⁶ <http://churchill-society-london.org.uk/StGeorge.html> - accessed October 2016.

⁴⁷ Shamit Saggar, *Race and British Politics* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf 1992), 73.

⁴⁸ R. A. Butler, Conservative Home Secretary, February 1961 quoted by I.R.G. Spencer, *British Immigration Policy Since 1939* (London: Routledge, 1997) 121.

be permitting ... the future growth of an immigrant-descended population. It is like watching a nation busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre. ' Powell then turned his attention to the 'dangerous delusion' of integration, because immigrants 'never conceived or intended such a thing, they had 'vested interests in the preservation and sharpening of racial and religious differences, with a view to the exercise of actual domination, first over fellow-immigrants and then over the rest of the population.' 'Communalism,' quoting a Minister in the then Labour Government, 'is a canker ... to be strongly condemned.' The 'immigrant communities' were organising, agitating and campaigning 'against their fellow-citizens ... to overawe and dominate the rest.' In a final rhetorical flourish he concluded that the state was 'blind to realities', that 'not to speak, would be the great betrayal, for as he look ahead, he was 'filled with foreboding. Like the Roman, I seem to see "the River Tiber foaming with much blood."' ⁴⁹

Powell's public statements on immigration made headline news, generated vociferous letters of support, and led to token strikes and demonstrations of support with workers reported in the national press, declaring 'Mr Powell spoke his mind. He spoke for us all. He made me feel proud to be British,' and:

At last the Englishman has had some guts. This is as important as Dunkirk. We are becoming second-class citizens in our own country. Immigrants have been brought here to undercut our wages in times of crisis. When there is vast unemployment in this country, immigrants will compete with you for your jobs. ⁵⁰

Powell himself was castigated in Parliament and ostracised by his party. Finally, in early 1969 Powell was questioned in depth in an extended television interview on the popular current affairs programme *Frost on Friday* about his immigration speeches and their impact. In one exchange David Frost asked Powell about the 'incendiary atmosphere' resulting from his speeches and Powell replied:

You accuse me of throwing the match on to the heap. Now the heap of gunpowder in this case is the pent up fear and anxiety for the future of the native population, which sees ... the extending of the numbers and area of immigrants. Now I want to ask you; what is the match ...? Not a politician who forces the whole of the country to see what is happening, who speaks what thousands of people in these areas concerned are saying to themselves, who answers their question: why does nobody speak to us? Are we alone? Are we trapped?

Pushed by Frost to condemn racist incidents following his speeches and particularly one where '... thugs were shouting: "Coloured people want burning. They're taking over. Enoch was right," Powell replied 'I am not going to start condemning the behaviour of people who are condemned by their behaviour ...' and continued in this vein for several exchanges with until pushed again about angry demonstrations in support of his statements, Powell replied:

⁴⁹ Bill Smithies and Peter Fiddick, *Enoch Powell on Immigration* (London: Sphere Books, 1969) 35-43

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 12, 13

I'll just put one point to you, to remind you, and that is of the Notting Hill riots, and of the Dudley riots, which occurred years before my name was ever heard of in this connection. I think we ought to bear that in mind as a matter of proportion.⁵¹

Powell's Island story was one of continuity and homogeneity, of soil and blood; the same ideas and language which circulated as part of his political legacy in the 1980s. His vision of the nation rejected multiculturalism. Immigrants with their distinctive customs and beliefs were inassimilable. For Powell, England and Britain were interchangeable categories and he spoke for all those who were driven to despair, those whose voices were not heard by Government. In short, he spoke for the ordinary, the decent and the working white population.

Disrupting the Island story

The 'racial antipathies' unleashed by Powell's intervention into debates in the 1960s about Britain's past, present and future positioned Powell as 'touchstone for speaking about race and nation',⁵² but the purity of Powell's England and its 'unaltered' identity so central to his Island story does not accord with history.⁵³ In recent year's research into the history of the black and Asian presence in Britain and the impact of Britain's imperial and Empire histories have questioned the dominant, unified, homogenised and linear narrative of Britain's island story and its unaltered identity. Much of this work has been driven by local activism where research has been going on in local community centres, adult education classrooms, and libraries and has been circulating through temporary exhibitions, small publishing enterprises and word of mouth. It is work which captures the local experiences of migration and settlement,⁵⁴ it is the work 'of politicised groups striving to understand their own histories through their own research and interpretation'⁵⁵ and it involved a process, as Stuart Hall wrote some 20 years ago, which 'transformed' lives:

The subjects of the local, of the margin, can only come into representation by ... recovering their own hidden histories. They have to ... retell the story from the bottom up ... These are the hidden histories

⁵¹ Ibid., 111, 118

⁵² Bill Schwarz, *Memories of Empire, Volume 1 The White Man's World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 19

⁵³ Similar sentiments were expressed by John Major during the early 1990s when he reassured the Conservative party in the face of growing Euro-scepticism that Britain would always remain Britain as the party was firmly connected with Britain's past and 'a continuous thread' of traditions, values and beliefs: see Grosvenor, *Assimilating Identities*, 192-94. Powell was aware that his version of Britain's island story was based on myth as he stated in a later speech: 'All history is myth. It is a pattern which men weave out of the materials of the past ... what I am saying is that a nation lives by its myths ... the greatest task of the statement therefore it to offer his people good myths and save them from harmful myths' quoted in Jonathan Rutherford, *Forever England. Reflections on Masculinity and Empire* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1997) 125.

⁵⁴ Ian Grosvenor, 'From the 'eye of history' to 'a second gaze': the visual archive and the marginalised in history of education', *History of Education*, 36, 4&5, (2007), 607-622. For a detailed account of these developments see Kevin Myers, *Struggle for a Past. Irish and Afro-Caribbean Histories in England, 1951-2000*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015 *passim*. See also, Rob Waters, 'Thinking Black : Peter Fryer's Staying Power and the Politics of Writing Black British History in the 1980s,' *History Workshop Journal*, 82 (Autumn 2016) 104-120.

⁵⁵ Carol Bressey, 'Geographies of Belonging: white women and black history, *Women's History Review*, 22, 4 (2013) 554.'

of the majority, which had never been told ... the speaking of a past that previously had no language.⁵⁶

Representation is not simply a manifestation of power, but 'an integral part of social processes of differentiation, exclusion, incorporation, and rule'⁵⁷ and once recognised history can be reframed, re-imagined and redefined by the struggle of the margins to come into representation.⁵⁸ It is work which while documenting black political agency and mobilisation around inequalities and discrimination⁵⁹ has also recorded the 'ordinary,' the matter-of-fact and the humdrum elements in people's lives being lived. An ordinariness captured in sight and sound. *Empire Road* shared experiences of place and habit and the characters interacted 'much more like the real-life Empire Roads all over Britain where blacks and whites live side by side without the kind of fuss so often highlighted by TV.'⁶⁰ It presented, to borrow Schaffer's phrase, the 'struggle for the Ordinary,' through storylines which involved 'the natural treatment of black people, and their natural involvement, in natural situations.'⁶¹ The programme brought out the interiority and integrity of the characters portrayed. The objects in the *West Indian Front Room* presented the sensory fullness of the domestic interior creatively furnished by the Windrush generation. Burke's photographs in *By the Rivers of Burninam* intimately document the everyday and his subjects were, as Hall perfectly observed, 'absorbed in their lives, their activities, their troubles, sorrows, joys, celebrations, griefs, struggles and resistances.'⁶² Collectively, looked at from the vantage point of the now they each in their own way function as a window onto lives past, and they bear witness to the habits, practices and occasions which in their ordinariness bound people together. It is an ordinariness which acts as a challenge to all those soothsayers who predicted that the black and Asian presence in Britain would result in 'anomie, alienation, delinquency and worse.'⁶³ It is an ordinariness which acts as a counterweight to the idea 'that black lives are only significant when they are the object of, or battling against racism.'⁶⁴ It is an ordinariness which audiences in their homes, in galleries, online and in print⁶⁵ could see, reflect upon and remember. Of course it is also an 'ordinariness' that Powell did not recognise in his particular vision of England and his mythic Island story.

⁵⁶ Stuart Hall, 'The Local and the Global: Globalisation and Ethnicity' in A. McCintock, A. Mufti and E. Shobar, (eds.) *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, National and Postcolonial Perspectives* (Minneapolis, 1997) 183-84.

⁵⁷ Craig Owens, 'Representation, Appropriation, and Power' in Scott Stewart Bryson, Barbara Kruger, Lynne Tillman and Jane Weinstock (eds.) *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992): 91.

⁵⁸ In more recent years much of this work has been supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

⁵⁹ See A. Sivanandan, 'From Resistance to Rebellion in *A Different Hunger* (London: Pluto Press, 1982) 3-54; Jenny Bourne (ed.) 'Race and Class: the colour struggle 1950s-1980s struggle.' *Race and Class*, 58, 1, 2016

⁶⁰ Mike Phillips, *Daily Mail*, October 28th 1978 quoted in Schaffer, *Vision of the Nation*, 258

⁶¹ The words are those of the dramatist Ted Willis spoken in 1971 when he described the representation of black and Asian communities on television as 'profoundly complacent, smug and even offensive,' quoted in Schaffer, *Vision of the Nation*, 235

⁶² Hall, 'Vanley Burke and the "Desire for Blackness,"' 13.

⁶³ *The Daily Telegraph*, 1977 quoted by Gary Younge, 'The Way We See' in Dennis Morris. *Growing Up Black* (Autograph: London, 2012) 13.

⁶⁴ Trevor Phillips quoted in Waters, 'Thinking Black,' 115.

⁶⁵ See, McMillan, *The Front Room. Migrant Aesthetics*; Lynda Morris, *Vanley Burke By the Rivers of Birminam* (Birmingham: Midland Arts Centre, 2012); and Michael Abbensetts, *Empire Road* (St Albans: Granada Publishing 1979)

Emily Jacir and Susan Buck-Morss have written of the practice ‘of preserving only “our” past that provides a continuous, linear trajectory for imagining “our” future’⁶⁶ and certainly such re-imagining as described above when presented has received a hostile reception from English policymakers and the press. Four examples exemplify this: two from Birmingham in 1972 and two from the recent present. In 1972 concerns were raised by members of Birmingham Education Committee and local head teachers about the teaching of ‘culturally relevant’ history at a Saturday school run by the Afro-Caribbean Self Help Organisation, with one Councillor declaring ‘I’ve interviewed these people ... [and] it came out loud and clear that their intention was to teach the supremacy of the black.’⁶⁷ The question of teaching a ‘culturally relevant’ history also surfaced in the mainstream when a Black Studies course which emphasised African history and black identity was taught at the William Murdoch School in Handsworth. Complaints were made about the course’s content and impact on pupils and the Chief Education Officer intervened to close the course.⁶⁸ Forty years later *The Mail on Sunday* under the editorial by-line ‘Education? No, ludicrous propaganda’ roundly condemned a new GCSE History syllabus as ‘designed to foster an ultra-Leftist view of immigration.’ Developed by the Black and Asian Studies Association it reported that the course was explicitly designed to banish a supposed ‘white, male dominated view of history,’ that students were to be taught that ‘some of our nation’s earliest inhabitants were Africans who arrived here long before the English,’ and that ‘some of Britain’s most eminent thinkers’ were ‘outraged’ that ‘once again political correctness’ was ‘distorting our history and the education of our children.’ One eminent thinker commented: ‘This seems to be aimed more at indoctrination than education. It is dangerous because a cohesive society depends on an authentic shared view of history.’⁶⁹ In 2017 the Cambridge classics professor, Mary Beard was vilified and abused online when she endorsed the accuracy of a BBC cartoon which presented a father in Roman Britain ‘as dark skinned.’ The response to her intervention led the historian David Olusoga to write: ‘It has been ugly. Two weeks of full on, culture wars inspired, anti-intellectualism, a fortnight of alternative facts-facts, dog-white racism and shameless misogyny.’⁷⁰ What, indeed, do they know of England who only England know?⁷¹

⁶⁶ Emily Jacir and Susan Buck-Morss, *100 Notes. No004 Documenta 13* (Kassel: Hatje Cantz, 2012): 39.

⁶⁷ J. Bergman and B. Coard, ‘Trials and Tribulations of a Self-Help Group,’ *Race Today* 4, 4, (1972): 112-14.

⁶⁸ See John Rex and Sally Tomlinson, *Colonial Immigrants in a British City. A Class Analysis* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979) 186-7. The School ceased to exist a year later following a reorganisation.

⁶⁹ ‘Education? No, Ludicrous Propaganda,’ *The Mail on Sunday*, January 10th 2016. For more detail see ‘GCSE pupils to be taught that the nations earliest inhabitants were Africans,’

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/index.html> 9th January, 2016. The ‘outraged’ eminent thinkers were V. S. Naipaul, Sir Roy Strong, Anthony Beevor, Alan Smithers, and Chris McGovern.

⁷⁰ David Olusoga, ‘Black people have had a presence in our history for centuries. Get over it,’ *The Observer* 13th August, 2017.

⁷¹ At the time of writing Lola Olufemi has been the target of racist and sexist abuse following a report in the Daily Telegraph in which she was named and pictured as being one of the authors of an open letter criticising the lack of black and minority ethnic authors on the University of Cambridge’s English course, see Nadia Khomami and Holly Watt, ‘Coverage of call to decolonise English course made student “target” for abuse,’ *The Guardian*, 27 October 2017, 9.

John Berger wrote in *Ways of Seeing*, 'The way we see things is affected by what we know and what we believe. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled.'⁷² Part of this reluctance to accept alternative narratives maybe a by-product of disciplinary practice. Within the discipline of History 'surprisingly little has been written' about migration and settlement⁷³ and it remains only 'a peripheral area of academic concern.'⁷⁴ Further, Marc Depaepe has referred to the formal and informal rules, values and norms of history writing; rules, values and norms which in reality operate to privilege particular narratives of national pasts, and marginalize or neglect other possible narratives.⁷⁵ In Sociology the dominant focus has been on documenting, analysing and reporting the nature and workings of racism and xenophobia in society.⁷⁶ 'Race concepts, ideas and propositions' have become so widespread and so powerful in Britain that, as Myers tellingly writes, it has 'proved difficult for historians and sociologists to resist the temptation to deploy them entirely descriptively' and in doing so 'they have contributed to a commonsense understanding that races, and relations between them, exist as independent and objective realities.'⁷⁷ Further, words such as identity, culture and community litter social science texts, but these words are not without their problems when used.⁷⁸ 'Community', for example, is problematic as a term of analysis because it has through use become reified; dividing society into 'seemingly homogenous collectives defined by ethnicity, class, education or religion and so forth'⁷⁹ and this artificial idea of community reinforces presumed differences between 'us', the white middle class, and the 'rest'. The issue of language can be pushed further. In 2000 a European Union funded project *Migration, Work and Identity* brought together seven museums of labour history to present 'a history of people in Europe told in museums'. The drive behind this initiative was captured in a speech by Rainer Ohliger:

⁷² John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972) 7.

⁷³ Martin Daunton, 'The Future Direction of British History: thinking about economic cultures,' *History Workshop Journal*, 72, 2011, 236.

⁷⁴ Kathy Burrell and Panikos Panayi, 'Introduction: immigration and British history' in K. Burrell and P. Panayi (eds.), *Histories and Memories: Immigrants and their History in Britain since 1800* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006):16

⁷⁵ Marc Depaepe, 'How Should the History of Education be Written?' *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 23 (2004) 333-45.

⁷⁶ Nancy L. Green, 'Terms and Concepts, Then and Now' in Anita Böcker and Leo Lucassen (eds) *Immigration and the Construction of Identities in Contemporary Europe: Transnational Ties and Identities* (Wassenaar, Neth.: NIAS, 2002) 40-44; Mica Nava 'Sometimes antagonistic, sometimes ardently sympathetic: Contradictory responses to migrants in postwar Britain' *Ethnicities*, 14, 3 (2014): 458-480. See also Lynda Nead, *The Tiger in the Smoke. Art and Culture in Post-War Britain* (London: Yale University Press, 2017)165-71 for a critique of the work of anthropologists and sociologists in the 1950s and the 'irrefutable sense of the difference of migrant communities in Britain' projected by their surveys.

⁷⁷ Kevin Myers, *Struggles for a Past. Irish and Afro-Caribbean Histories in England, 1951-2000*. (Manchester: MUP, 2015):3.

⁷⁸ See Marci Green and Ian Grosvenor 'Making Subjects: History-Writing, Education and "Race" Categorisation', *Paedagogica Historica*, 33, 3 (1997) 883-908; Ian Grosvenor, 'It is on the site of loss that hopes are born': migration, education and the writing of history' in Declercq, E., Kusters, W. And VandenBorre, S. (eds.) *Migration and Intercultural Identities in relation to Border Regions (19th and 20th centuries)* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2012): 29-48

⁷⁹ Emma Waterton and Laurajane Smith, 'The recognition and misrecognition of community heritage', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 16, 1, (2010), 5.

The image of Europe's Self is, despite historically different experiences, still determined by national paradigms and modes of interpretation. This leaves little room for the representation of border-transcending phenomena such as migration or processes resulting from migration. Migrants are written into [the] national memories ... of European nations as Others ... They are seldom portrayed as part of the Self.⁸⁰

While the concept of the 'Other' is inextricably linked to the idea of the 'Self' when applied to social groups it becomes as equally problematic as a term of analysis as 'community'. The 'Other' in this context is constructed as an opposite and the act of 'Othering', the delineation of commonalities and differences between self and others, the bringing into being of individual and collective identities, always functions as a manifestation of power relations. 'Othering' is sedimented in racialising codes of representation, produces knowledge that shapes perceptions and practices and has consequences for those so named, so imagined. In other words, when we seek to explain the past or the present through the use of such language, the mere fact of telling 'can function as a way of pointing the finger' and reinforcing boundaries of difference. Such boundaries are also emphasised when we speak of 'diversity', as again to have meaning it is dependent on the process of 'Othering,' the identification of a normative or neutral point from which 'Others' can be so identified, named and assigned as 'diverse.' Repetition helps to authenticate and legitimise ideas. As part of our practice as historians we need to be conscious about the fixity of the descriptors we use; and we need to interrogate the changing meanings attached to the given lexicon of analysis and comment. 'You cannot', as Fanshawe and Srisikandarajah write, 'liberate people unless you liberate the language in which you talk about them.'⁸¹ In other words through our practice we reinforce the notion of difference, which in turn helps to sustain an exclusive narrative of belonging and 'the resulting condition of "historylessness" to quote Paul Gilroy, 'has been a measure of black marginality.'⁸² Of course, this is not to argue for less research on racism and xenophobia, far from it, but rather to not lose sight of the 'ordinary'. Neither *Empire Road* nor *By the Rivers of Burninam* (see Fig. 4) ignored the ever present impact of racism on daily life; indeed, when the 'ordinary' is placed alongside the former the very fact of its attainment becomes 'extraordinary.'⁸³

Insert Fig 4 'Africa Liberation Day, Handsworth, 1977, 'Birmingham City Archives, copyright Vanley Burke

Looking back from the present

Kipling's 'What do they know of England who only England Know?' was employed in John Lanchester's article 'Brexit Blues,' but reformulated as 'What do they know of the UK who only London know? as he tried to explain the outcome of the EU referendum. For Lanchester the Britain that went to the ballot box was both a

⁸⁰ Rainer Ohliger, 'Towards a European Migration Museum.' Unpublished paper given at the Conference on Migration, Work and Identity, 22-23 November 2001. The museums were in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom

⁸¹ Simon Fanshawe and Dhananjayan Srisikandarajah, 'You Can't Put Me In a Box'. *Super-diversity and the end of identity politics in Britain*. (London: Institute for Public Policy Research, January 2010):30.

⁸² Paul Gilroy, *Black Britain. A Photographic History* (London: Saqi, 2007):23

⁸³ See Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984) and Waters, 'Thinking Black,' *passim*.

country with an internationalised economy, with high skill levels located in particular areas of the UK and where EU immigrants were net contributors to the UK's finances, but at the same time was a also country 'where to be born in many places ... [was] to suffer an irreversible lifelong defeat – a truncation of opportunity, of education , of access to power, of life expectancy,' where work was 'unsatisfying, insecure and low-paid', and cumulatively failed to 'offer a sense of identity or community or self-worth,' and instead generated a sense of loss, of not being heard, of not understanding either how the world worked or one's place in it.' The primary reality of Britain, he concluded was 'not so much class as geography. Geography is destiny. And for much of the country, not a happy destiny.'⁸⁴

Birmingham as a city voted by a small margin to leave the EU, but all of the inner wards, the wards generally associated with Asian and black British subjects all voted to remain.⁸⁵ Is it a coincidence that in the 1980s these were the very wards where Birmingham's Multicultural Education Service was most active in terms of curriculum intervention and is it further evidence regarding Lanchester's argument about the significance of place⁸⁶. The Multicultural Education Service has long since disappeared as a consequence of changing education policies and funding at both national and local levels, but these wards remain centres of local activism in seeking out hidden histories of migration and settlement.⁸⁷ As the historical geographer Doreen Massey observed, 'The identity of places is very much bound up with the histories which are told of them, how these histories are told, and which memory turns out to be dominant.'⁸⁸

One of the authors of the 1972 account of the difficulties faced by the Afro-Caribbean Self Help Organisation was the black activist Bernard Coard. Published in the journal *Race Today*, it included another local story that mirrored that of ASHO, the difficulties faced in the 1950s by the Birmingham Polish Supplementary School in the face of local authority hostility. The article ended with the advice of the school's headmistress to persist and let time demonstrate what can be achieved.⁸⁹ In one of the most important books on education published in the last ten years *Radical Education and the Common School* (2011) Michael Fielding and Peter Moss introduced the idea of 'critical case studies of possibilities' and a challenge to engage with the past to progress social alternatives in education. Fielding and Moss were talking of state schooling, but their idea of critical case studies of possibilities is equally relevant here. The story of Birmingham in 1972 suggests the importance of another history, one of 'common cause', of solidarity and collective action.

⁸⁴ Lanchester, 'Brexit Blues'

⁸⁵ See Birmingham City Council, https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/downloads/file/3270/eu_referendum_results_2016_by_constituency_and_ward accessed October 2016.

⁸⁶ See Myers and Grosvenor, 'Birmingham Stories,' 149-62.

⁸⁷ See, for example, the Heritage Lottery Funded projects *Multiple Heritage Voices. Birmingham 1950-2006* (Birmingham: Race Equality West Midlands, 2007) and *Lozells and Handsworth Heritage Trail* (Birmingham: Legacy West Midlands, 2011) see also www.legacy-wm.org for an online version of the trail and a series of related community interviews

⁸⁸ Doreen Massey, 'Places and their Pasts.' *History Workshop Journal*, 39 (spring, 1995), 186.

⁸⁹ Bergman and Coard, 'Trials and Tribulations,'

John Berger commented in 2016: 'What two different people will have in common will always, in all cases, be larger than what differentiates them. And yet for dozens of different reasons circumstances blind people to that.'⁹⁰ At a time of increasing popular nationalism in the UK and reported rapidly growing ethnic separatism in British cities⁹¹ we need to build an alternative narrative of the nation which includes the history of the 'ordinary' as argued for here, alongside the history of black political agency in the face of racism, but we also need to seek out the sights, sounds and texts of those other elements in the coalition of voices that have come together in the past to challenge racism and social injustice. We need to uncover the stories of collective action and to excavate alternative cultural memories as an act of resistance 'across ethnicities, eschewing petty nationalism; and eventually, forging new anti-racist struggles.'⁹² As the black British cultural curator and activist Colin Prescod affirmed in his keynote *Archives, race, class and rage* at the annual conference of the Archives and Records Association in 2016:

So note, please, that I've not been talking about merely being acknowledged in the record(s). the journey that I've framed my remarks around continues to be connected with rage against 'othering'; rage against 'White-washing the record, rage against systemic, institutionalised denial; rage against continuing, intransigent, irritating deliberating, distracting and destructive racism. This is rage about the necessity of transformation, a million miles from mere toleration. This is rage about making the curatorial interventions into curative interventions. Archives have become a site of struggle.'⁹³

Transformation and the stripping out the discourse of 'difference' will not be easy. The idea of a distinctive immutable community rooted in a specific place, unified and held in common across time is not only embedded in Powell's Island story, Thatcherism and New Right Discourse, but is at the heart of the contemporary defence of neoliberalism and depictions of multiculturalism as anachronistic, outmoded, divisive and a force for fostering white resentment.⁹⁴ Commentators across the political spectrum have argued that Britain is becoming 'too diverse,' and that 'we' live 'among stranger citizens,' strangers with their own 'rooted' cultural identities that undermine and threaten to erode our 'common culture,' while the promotion of multiculturalism privileged the needs of minorities over the needs, desires and traditions of ordinary people.⁹⁵ Not only Powell's vision of the future made manifest, but also the context for the 2016 cry to 'take

⁹⁰ John Berger quoted by Kate Kellaway, 'If I'm a storyteller it's because I listen, *The Observer*, 30th October, 2016.

⁹¹ Ted Cante and Eric Kaufmann *Is Segregation Increasing in the UK?* published by Open Democracy on 2nd November 2016 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/wfd/ted-cante-and-eric-kaufmann/is-segregation-on-increase-in-uk>

⁹² Colin Prescod. 'Archives, race, class and rage,' *Race and Class* 58, 4 April-June 2017 <http://journals.sagepub.com.ezproxyd.bham.ac.uk/doi/pdf/10.1177/0306396816686278> accessed October 2017. See Ian Grosvenor and Natasha Macnab, 'Photography as an agent of transformation: education, community and documentary photography in post war Britain', *Paedagogica Historica* 51, 1&2 (2015):117-135.

⁹³ Prescod, 'Archives, race, class and rage,'84.

⁹⁴ See Paul Warmington, 'The Emergence of Black British Social Conservatism,' *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 38, 7 (2015) 1152-1168.

⁹⁵ David Goodheart, 'Too Diverse,' *Prospect* 95(February, 2004). See also, Brian M. Barry *Culture and Equality: An Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Bob Rowthorn, 'Migration Limits,' *Prospect* 83 (2003) 24-31; 'Profile: Trevor Phillips: The racial weather vane changes direction', *The Times* 2 May 2004; David Goodhart, *The Road to Somewhere: The Populist Revolt and the Future*

back control.’ Narratives shape our lives. Looking back over the last twenty years it may be the case as Tony Benn wrote, ‘Every generation must fight the same battles again and again. There’s no final victory and there’s no final defeat,’ but this should not dissuade us from the task of surfacing these alternative narratives of the nation and generating solidarity with one another.⁹⁶

of Politics (London: Hurst & Co, 2017); Edward Luce, *The Retreat of Western Liberalism* (London: Little, Brown, 2017); and David Miller *Strangers in our midst* (Harvard University Press, 2016).

⁹⁶ Tony Benn interviewed in *the New Internationalist*: <https://newint.org/features/2010/10/01/tony-benn-caroline-lucas-mp-agent-bristly-pioneer/>